

## Introduction

On the afternoon of Friday 8 February 1895, a sad procession wound its way southwards from the Anglican Church in Monte Carlo, through the city streets to the cemetery at boulevard Charles III, perched on the hillside on the edge of town. The chief mourners were Olive Burroughs and Laura Riggs, wife and sister of Silas Mainville Burroughs. Many of the pharmacists and all of the English doctors of Monte Carlo followed. At the same time a special train took 200 staff from the headquarters of the pharmaceutical firm Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., in the city of London, to Dartford, Kent, home of the firm's manufacture, for a memorial service at the parish church. The church flag hung at half-mast, and tradesmen put up shutters as a mark of respect. Burroughs's many friends, leading businessmen from London, all the works staff from London and Dartford, civic officers and many inhabitants of the town attended. His sudden unexpected death, at 49, deeply shocked many people, and obituaries appeared in newspapers across the globe.

The impact of his death was all the greater because Burroughs was a hugely popular personality who inspired great friendship and loyalty through his warmth, generosity, concern for others, and ideals for creating a fairer and kinder world. The irony of his death may well have crossed the minds of some of the mourners; Burroughs was an apparently fit man who had spent his life promoting the effectiveness of pills and medicines, yet none of the products offered by his pharmaceutical firm could save him from pneumonia, a major killer in the pre-antibiotic age.

Few people today have heard of Silas Burroughs, although an older generation may recall purchasing drugs from Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., which was renamed the Wellcome Foundation Ltd in 1924, and there is a Burroughs Wellcome Foundation in America. Now even the name Wellcome no longer exists, since that firm merged with Glaxo, which subsequently merged with SmithKlineBeecham in 2000 to become

GlaxoSmithKline. Yet the name of Henry Wellcome, Burroughs's business partner, is still known today because of Wellcome's collections and the work of the Wellcome Trust, a major charity established under Henry Wellcome's will. But what of Burroughs? Who has heard of him? Why has he sunk into obscurity?

There are several reasons. Certainly his early death meant that Burroughs did not benefit from the awards and kudos that attach to successful businessmen in their later years. But there is a more important reason. By the end of Burroughs's life he and Wellcome were at daggers drawn. Their early friendship, dating from the 1870s when they were both in America, deteriorated from mistrust to hostility to dislike and, finally, to positive animosity. There were years of attempts by Burroughs to create a joint stock company and then legal battles to dissolve the firm. Amazingly Burroughs, Wellcome & Co. continued to thrive under these extraordinary circumstances. With Burroughs's death Wellcome was able to take over the firm under the conditions of their partnership agreement, although he had to fight a long hard battle with Olive, Burroughs's widow.

Understandably Wellcome subsequently had no desire to praise a man he had quarrelled with so bitterly. Neither he nor Burroughs left any autobiographical record, and Wellcome never spoke of the relationship they had once enjoyed or paid due recognition to Burroughs's role. Both the unpublished and published biographies of Henry Wellcome emphasise his importance and achievements and compare Burroughs unfavourably with him, downplaying his contribution to the success of the firm and even suggesting that he was a potential threat to its success. In 1998 this author learnt of the existence of some personal papers held by the Burroughs family, and these were transferred to the Wellcome Library. The documents, writings and photographs left by Burroughs and his family, together with records of the firm and publication of a company history, mean that it is now possible to re-examine Burroughs's life and career and the tortured relationship between the two partners.

Burroughs was not simply a brilliant hard-working salesman but a dynamic entrepreneur and manufacturer with vision and drive. He was crucial to the foundation and shaping of Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., which became internationally important for its innovative drugs in just 15 years. It emerged at a key period in the history of pharmaceutical manufacturing. We now know more about the many other aspects of Burroughs. His upbringing in upstate New York with a wealthy politician father; his world travels; his staunch Presbyterianism; his promotion of Christian socialist principles and strongly held political beliefs across

a wide range of causes, including world peace; his interest in radical and liberal politics, which led to involvement in political reforms as a speaker, writer and activist who was not averse to demonstrating on the streets; his campaigning for the single tax movement and friendship with its founder Henry George; and the donation of much of his wealth to charities, both during his life and through bequests.

Silas Burroughs deserves to be remembered not just as a businessman and partner of Henry Wellcome. He was described as a 'citizen of the world' because his travels, contacts and character made an impact on people everywhere. Quite simply, without Burroughs there would have been no Burroughs, Wellcome & Co. and no Wellcome Trust. This biography will redress previous one-sided views of his achievements and justify his place in the historical record as the man who made Wellcome.

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